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GOVERNMENT IN SPANISH AMERICA

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Although the events of the recent Mexican tragedy cannot be seen today in as clear light as that which will be thrown on them for the next generation, still the political history of the communities established by Spain in America furnishes a certain measure of enlightenment. This history seems to indicate that the Spanish colonies were unfortunate in that the government of the United States, in its early decades, appeared to them as a desirable model for the Spanish-American states that were created after the war of independence. The English colonies, left to themselves, had a normal development along lines determined by their environment and their inherent social forces. The Spanish colonies, founded by authority, were developed under a protective system designed to subserve the interests of Spaniards. The disappearance of the Indians before the invading English cleared the field for the democracy that was produced by the colonial conditions of the frontier. The incorporation of the Indians as a subordinate class in the colonial society of Spanish America, and the creation, by royal authority, of a titled nobility made democratic states impossible.

In view of this state of affairs, the principal leaders of the movement for the emancipation of the Spanish colonies opposed the project to set up democratic governments. But the restrictions of various kinds imposed by the authorities of Spain, and the exclusion of creoles from the high civil and ecclesiastical offices had caused the rise of a party hostile not only to Spain's administration but also to the political policy of the leaders of the revolution. This party, composed principally of creoles and mestizos, represented whatever public opinion existed in Spanish America at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The members of this party were especially influenced by the doc-

trines of *The Rights of Man*, and by the successful experience of the United States; and, opposing the views of Bolívar and San Martín, they became the champions of democracy, and the effective advocates of a democratic policy for the new states.

The unsatisfactory consequences that have attended the attempts to carry out this policy hitherto have had their primary cause in the character of the society that came into existence in the colonial period. This society was undemocratic. It was composed of representatives of distinct races; and the lines separating classes were very rigidly drawn. Whether under viceroys, captains general, or governors of subordinate districts, this society was subjected to absolute rule for a period of two hundred and fifty years. All of its knowledge of government, and all of its political traditions, whether derived from Spanish or American experience, had imposed upon the public mind not the idea of government by law, but the idea of government by an individual person.

After this long schooling in absolutism, it is not strange that the Spanish-American nations have been disposed to fix their hopes on prominent leaders in times of political difficulty. Everywhere, even under a liberal representative régime, in seasons of distress and national anxiety, there is an apparently natural tendency on the part of the people to turn to some one man rather than to a congress or to a popular assembly. It was to President Lincoln and not to Congress that we looked for national salvation in the anxious days of the Civil War; and in these days of peace, if there is important legislation needed, we turn to the President, hoping he will espouse the projected measure and, as it is said, "force it through Congress."

During the colonial period, the municipalities of Spanish America were the only governmental organizations that were rooted in the people; and even these were established by individual leaders. In this undertaking the founder of a town acted with as much independence as a proprietor who would select a site for a mill or a manufactory. He caused the lots to be surveyed, distributed them among the actual settlers, and, in the first instance, appointed the regidores, or members of the municipal

council. For subsequent terms these officers were elected by the citizens; but later, in many cases, the practice of election was set aside in favor of selling the places, and the sale was sometimes effected by public auction at the entrance of the municipal building. The office in possession of the purchaser was exploitable, like other property, and was liable to attachment for debt. The municipality was often subject to the arbitrary intervention of the governor of the little district in which it lay. This tended generally to destroy the independence of the council; but sometimes, through the conflicts induced by this interference, the towns learned how to defend their rights, and acquired a degree of self-confidence that gave them supreme importance as supporters of the creole-mestizo movement for emancipation.

When the Spanish power was overthrown, the municipality was left as the sole possessor of legitimate civil authority. Besides this, there was only social confusion and the acts of persons and groups without political responsibility; and the creation of a liberal government for each of the new states encountered a serious obstacle in the fact that all of the governmental traditions of these states were the traditions of Spanish absolutism. Moreover, the leaders of the various armies were in favor of the continuance of monarchical rule, and the mass of the people, ignorant of any general government but that of the viceroy or the captain general, were in a condition to submit without difficulty to any dictator who might boldly proclaim his power. More powerful, perhaps, than any of these factors was the influence of the higher clergy and the members of the Inquisition. Devoted to the maintenance of a sanctified absolutism, these officials were opposed not only to the creation of a liberal government, but even to separation from Spain.

While there was no population outside of the towns that counted politically, the municipalities furnished organizations already formed, through which public opinion and the aspiration for independence might find expression. Moreover, when independence had been achieved, some of the towns that had acquired a certain degree of political prestige during the conflict, became too important in their own estimation to submit quietly to the

rule of a general government, which was practically controlled by a rival city. Under these conditions, military leaders appeared as champions of the interests of their respective cities; and the habit of leading revolts thus acquired sometimes manifested itself when the interest of the leader was the sole or principal motive to action. Events of this kind were facilitated by the fact that, while one city might refuse to submit to the rule of a rival city, there were no traditions, either in the society of the colonies or in that of the republics, which sanctioned the popular control of persons in authority.

In an undemocratic society and under the influence of Spanish and colonial traditions in favor of absolute rule, the creation of a stable government as democratic as that of the United States was practically impossible; yet the creole-mestizo element of the population, that had caused the rejection of the monarchical idea, was dominated by the thought that the northern republic might be closely followed as a model. This established a hopeless antagonism between the advocates of the creole-mestizo project, consciously formed, and the unformulated forces proceeding from the nature of the society. This situation was rendered more unfortunate by the absence of the spirit of compromise, which was in a large measure due to the influence of the church. In its assumption of transcendental wisdom, the church was necessarily disposed to regard its view, whether of things divine or human, as the absolute truth. Long merged in the state, and having become an important element in the society of the colonies and of the independent nations that succeeded them, it transmitted more or less of its uncompromising disposition to all of the participants in political life. It thus tended to vitiate or destroy the attitude of mind presumed in a deliberative assembly or in a government involving many persons of different opinions. Liberal government has been successful only where the clash of divergent ideas and interests has been attended by a willingness to yield a point when necessary to effect an agreement. But in so far as the church communicated its spirit to the politics of Spanish America, it made parties uncompromising, and tended to cause conflicts of opinions to be followed by physical conflicts.

The advocates of democracy entertained an ideal of government that had been successfully realized where there was a large measure of social equality, and where habits acquired by centuries of experience had ripened into a political instinct. Both of these conditions were wanting in Spanish America. There was no equality either in social standing or in material possessions, and the mass of the people had had no political experience whatsoever. Attempts to organize democratic governments were, therefore, destined to be crowned with very little success; and when democracy fails, its successor is not infrequently absolute monarchy. Thus, during the early decades of the independent Spanish-American states, there was in some sense an alternation of representative government and dictatorial rule. The fact that all of the independent states on the American continent had a revolutionary origin removed from the irregular beginnings of these governments any stigma they might have had, if the people had not shortly before resorted to usurpation in establishing their political independence. These short-lived governments provoked opposition not by reason of their irregular origin, but because they failed to perform governmental functions in a satisfactory manner, or because their purposes were disapproved. Opinions honestly held concerning dictators, even by members of an enlightened nation, are determined less by the illegality of their assumption of power than by the purposes of the governments which they establish.

But out of the disturbed state of affairs, which succeeded the war for Spanish-American independence, three typical forms of government have been evolved, represented by the aristocratic, or oligarchic, government of Chile, by the dictatorship, which has appeared in several countries, and by the representative governments of Peru and the Argentine Republic. The period of confusion was shorter in Chile than in most of the other states. The Chileans very early found a form of government adapted to the nature of their society. The sole social element that could dominate the country, was the aristocracy of the capital. This was not only the most cultivated and enlightened part of the population; it was at the same time the richest. The members

of this aristocracy had vast territorial possessions, and over the common people who depended upon these estates for their livelihood, they exercised a control not greatly unlike the rule of the medieval feudal lord. They were enabled by means of these estates to exert a powerful influence in every part of the country. They had, it is true, little experience in the affairs of government; but their cultivation and their experience in the management of property gave them a two-fold advantage over the larger part of the Chilean people, who were entirely illiterate and for generations had been subordinated to masters.

The prestige of military leaders and their reluctance to give up their positions of supreme control constituted an important hindrance to the establishment of civil government in Chile. Here, as in many other cases, the officers of the army were disposed to continue in power, when the circumstances no longer demanded the exercise of military authority. But the experience of ten years showed clearly to the cultivated minority of the nation, that the arbitrary power of a military officer did not furnish a sufficiently stable basis for a permanent government. Moreover, the ignorance of the bulk of the population, and the absence of provincial autonomy rendered unsuccessful the attempt to create a liberal federal republic. In order to put an end to the political and administrative confusion, there was needed, in the first place, a party embracing the instructed and controlling elements of the various communities, and competent to make its power recognized throughout the country; and, in the second place, a president responsible to this party, but with sufficient authority to enable him to act promptly and effectively. The idea of a government embodying provisions like these found expression in the constitution of 1833. Besides a president with extensive powers, there was a congress elected under a restricted suffrage, which excluded the large uninstructed class from participation in governmental affairs. The fundamental purpose of the new organization was to provide a head of the state, who would be efficient but responsible to a strong party; in other words, to confer upon the aristocracy the power to govern the country, and thus avoid, on the one hand, the evils of an irrespon-

sible dictator, and, on the other hand, the equally dreaded evils of an ignorant and undisciplined democracy.

The aristocracy recognized by this constitution was not limited by birth or official appointment, but embraced the enlightened part of the population, and might be increased as cultivation was extended. Under its domination, the suffrage was not regarded as a remedy for curing class ignorance, but as a means for providing an administration that would preserve order, afford protection to life and property, and furnish conditions favorable for the development of the material and intellectual interests of the nation. Resting on the instructed and conservative part of the inhabitants, this government has avoided the selfish tyranny of dictatorial rule and the caprices of an ignorant populace. Its superior stability and efficiency as compared with other governments created in Spanish America under similar social conditions suggest its adaptability to any society that has assumed a form comparable with that of Chile.

The frequent appearance of the dictator in the Spanish-American states has been facilitated by the failure of the cultivated part of the inhabitants to form a party competent to dominate the country in question. This failure has been due to various causes: to the lack of experience in government; to the absence of political toleration; to want of a compromising spirit; and to the suspicion with which the individual members of the several communities have been accustomed to regard one another. Chile, in this respect, was more fortunate than the other nations; for, in facing the hostility of the Araucanians throughout the greater part of the colonial period, they had been, to a certain extent, compelled to act in concert. But most of the inhabitants of the towns or principal groups in other countries, by reason of the isolation in which they lived, became divided into antagonistic factions, and consequently incapable of forming a party sufficiently powerful to thwart the designs of a dictator.

The Spanish-American dictatorships are practical illustrations of the government described by Machiavelli in *The Prince*. This famous book is not to be taken as a recommendation by the author, in which are stated his moral preferences, but rather as

the solution of a problem: Given an absolute prince, or ruler, what conduct is consistent with, or required for, the maintenance of his rule? Machiavelli recognized other forms of government as better than this, but if one would rule absolutely, the course described by him must be pursued, and the conclusions involving the acts specified are generalizations from the facts of absolute government as it had appeared prior to the sixteenth century; and the history of absolute government since he wrote has in no way controverted his conclusions. It was, in general, small states that presented Machiavelli's data, and the small states of Spanish America under dictators furnish the most perfect illustrations of his doctrines. The rule of Dr. Francia in Paraguay (1817-1840) was so completely in harmony with these doctrines that one might be disposed to think *The Prince* had been his political guide.

But the Spanish-American dictators were less directed by written prescriptions than by an instinctive appreciation of the acts required in the execution of their plans. Their courses of conduct were not the same in all cases, but the variation was determined by the different personal characters of the dictators and their different environments. The cold, calculating ascetic of Paraguay could not be expected to act in the same manner as the laborious and impulsive Rosas of the Argentine Republic, or the brutal Huerta of Mexico. Yet, by whatever means they have attained absolute power, or under whatever circumstances they have ruled, the results of their reigns have, in a measure, common characteristics. The most striking of these characteristics is a certain national deterioration, the extent or permanence of which naturally holds some relation to the length of the reign in question. Although Francia was made dictator for life in 1817, he had been the controlling figure in Paraguayan affairs during the previous six years, having been the leading member of the governmental *junta*, or commission, organized in 1811, and dictator for three years from 1814. Thus, for more than twenty years, he held Paraguay isolated from the rest of the world, practically without foreign commerce, and without immigration or emigration.

The large Indian element in the population of Paraguay made retrogression under the isolation imposed by Francia inevitable; and the tyranny of the dictator predisposed the inhabitants to be led like unreasoning cattle by Francia's successors, Calos Antonio and Francisco Solano Lopez. The second Lopez, carrying out the dictatorial policy of his predecessors, and moved by an insane ambition to play the rôle of a great conqueror in South America, plunged recklessly into a war with Brazil, Uruguay, and the Argentine Republic, during which the larger part of the population of Paraguay disappeared.

In the Argentine Republic, Rosas' fierce persecution (1835-52) drove many of the nation's most enlightened men into exile. Taking refuge in Montevideo and Santiago de Chile, they gave an intellectual impulse to life in those cities; and Buenos Aires not only lost for the time being its men of greatest promise, but the inhabitants, terrorized by the dictator's system of spies, became suspicious of one another, and the hopeful prospects of progress were for a period obscured under the influence of a brutalizing tyranny.

The increased promptness and efficiency of the government that has passed into the hands of a dictator, who is not obliged to consult a ministry or a parliament, sometimes evokes eulogies before his course is entirely run, or the results of his government are fully appreciated. This was the attitude assumed by many persons with respect to the administration of Porfirio Diaz, lately dictator of Mexico. The material development of the nation was seen, but it was not always appreciated that this economic growth was largely a contribution to the wealth of other nations; and the spiritual decay passed entirely unobserved.

In Chile, political power rested in the hands of a cultivated minority of the nation, but within this minority, there was movement, free discussion, and, among those practically enjoying political rights, a general eligibility to office. One president followed another in legitimate succession within the political class, personal rivalry and the possibility of acquiring positions of influence and power facilitated an active interchange of ideas and the maintenance of a normal political life. A step towards

this end had been taken in Mexico by a constitutional provision that no president was eligible for the term succeeding that of his incumbency. But Diaz caused this provision to be annulled by an amendment of the constitution, and subsequently ruled without interruption, until overthrown by the Madero revolution.

The generation that grew up in Mexico during the reign of Diaz, reached maturity without acquiring any sense of independent political power. There was no party, either large or small, to whom Diaz was responsible. There was no independent organization of the Mexican people or of any part of them, on which the government rested. The Mexican people as a vital political body had ceased to exist. Underneath a network of offices depending on the will of one man, there was social chaos. Diaz had destroyed the moral life of the nation; and when he was removed it became evident that the official structure, which he had created, had no more foundation than the crust of cooled lava over seething volcanic fires.

When the morale of a nation has thus been destroyed, or its development prevented, a national revival, or a popular regeneration, cannot be effected by a decree or by the adoption of a law. It is not the law which determines what the form and character of a society shall be, but the form and character of a society which determine what laws shall have vital force and be executed. Among the inhabitants of the United States, there are many intelligent persons whose experience and practical knowledge of social conditions are limited to the affairs of their own country; and they very naturally entertain the opinion that the democratic institutions which were developed in the colonies contained in themselves a regenerating force and that other nations would have a fortunate political experience similar to that of the United States, if laws framed in accordance with democratic principles were adopted by them. But it is idle to suppose that a chaotic state of political demoralization, like that into which Mexico has fallen, can be transformed into a condition of order and enlightenment by the simple means of a democratic election. An ignorant and brutalized majority, even when empowered to express its views by the ballot, is not competent to accomplish

the spiritual regeneration, which must attend the rise, in that unfortunate country, of a beneficent and stable government.

Peace, prosperity, and good government for Mexicans do not lie in that direction. The population of Mexico is not democratic. It embraces a limited number of men of distinguished attainments, a considerable body of cultivated and enlightened persons; but the majority, the bulk, of the nation is composed of illiterate Indians and mestizos. With respect to its general character, this population is similar to that of Chile, and the governmental policy under which the Chileans have had a comparatively fortunate political existence offers the most hopeful suggestion for Mexico; in fact, the tragedy of these last years would probably have been avoided, if Diaz, thirty years ago, had been sufficiently patriotic, or unselfish enough, to unite with the leading Mexicans in forming a combination of the cultivated men of his country for the purpose of controlling the government; if, in other words he had coöperated with the more enlightened members of the nation in forming a strong party, whom the president should regard as his constituents, and used his influence to cause the presidential office to be held by a series of competent persons in succession.

This suggestion is not in harmony with the views of those persons who consider the extension of the suffrage as the sovereign remedy for all national ills; still the only practicable government for any Spanish-American state, under the present condition of the inhabitants, is either an aristocratic government or a dictatorship. Even the well-ordered governments of Peru and the Argentine Republic are nominally broadly representative, but practically only a small part of the citizens of these countries exercise political rights freely. The end aimed at in some districts in the southern part of the United States, has already been reached in both Peru and the Argentine Republic: persons entitled by law to vote are prevented from exercising this right. In this way, representative governments, which, according to the constitution rest on a democratic basis, are transformed into aristocracies or oligarchies, in spite of the law.

Although the Spanish-American nations have certain similar

features, they have at the same time important fundamental differences. These differences refer to two principal causes. One of these causes is the varying physical environment. Almost every known kind of soil and climate is found between the nothern lands of Mexico and the southern end of the continent; and this variation of environment has already exerted, and is still destined to exert, a powerful influence in the development of diversified national types. The differences observed will be increased from generation to generation by continued subjection to the forces of varied physical conditions.

Another cause of national diversity is the unlike popular elements that have united with the Spaniards to form the body of the common people. The union of the hardy and fierce Araucanian with the Spaniard, to take a single example, has made the common man in Chile very different from the Peruvian, in whom the blood of the Spaniard is mingled with the blood of the more gentle and subservient Inca Indian. And the divergence is even more marked in so far as the Indians of pure blood have been adopted and become members of the respective nations. This national divergence, in the course of time, will be further increased by European immigration in some cases and the lack of it in others. In the Argentine Republic, for example, through abundant immigration, the national type is becoming more and more completely European, and the continuance of this process will tend gradually to eliminate the Indian blood. In some other countries, however, like Bolivia, not attractive as places of residence for Europeans, the national type will become more thoroughly assimilated to that of the Indians. And this differentiation of the nations will necessarily bring about a differentiation of governments; but, while these governments of the future may possibly depart from any form now adaptable to conditions in Spanish America, their qualities cannot be clearly discerned by any political prophet of the present.